Against the Grain

Volume 22 | Issue 6 Article 8

December 2010

Building Sustainable Libraries Preliminary Survey Results

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toral student at **Ball State University**, provided this first analysis. We also include a short version of the article "Ecological Footprint" by **Whitney Bauman**, **Florida International University**, published in the first volume of the *Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability.* The authors provide many great links and resources for your exploration of the subject, and practice, of sustainability.

Because I've written about it in ***Against the Grain*** so recently (January 2010), I did not include a separate article on the challenges posed by digital publishing. But this may be the biggest issue facing librarians and publishers, and I will continue to provide information and recommended links at my blog (yes, indeed, online!). Here, though, I'd like to share a few thoughts.

I love trees and even had the idea of including an article on trees in world history — written by the **Cambridge University** botanist **Oliver Rackham** — in the new *Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History*. There's a reason we think so much about trees — beyond the fact that paper is the easiest thing to tackle in our workplaces.

Scientists call whales and elephants "charismatic megafauna." Trees are charismatic megaflora, and they represent for us the world of nature that we want our grandchildren to enjoy. Their size, age, and beauty elicit a sense of reverence. But most trees are not quite so precious, individually. The phrase "killing a tree" is overkill; trees are a renewable resource, and we need to see beyond them in order to do our jobs as providers of information, knowledge, and wisdom.

Our use of energy and water matters much more than wood pulp. In the eastern United States, mountaintop forests are often destroyed in order to get at coal to fuel power plants — and generate the electricity that powers eBook readers, so eBooks might in some cases kill more trees than print books. I'm committed to digital publishing and doing more of it all the time, so this sermon is one I'm preaching to myself, my staff, and to vendor and publishing partners (who include **Credo Reference**, **GVRL**, **EBSCO**), and others.

The impact of print publishing is almost entirely in the production of the paper itself and in the transport of the books. Publishers can reduce the paper impact by participating in the Green Print Initiative, but we also need to improve our supply chains. Books are heavy, yet they are sometimes shipped six to eight times before reaching the library.

Digital publishing is more complicated. Impact comes from data storage, data distribution, raw material extraction, e-waste disposal, and toxic clean-up. Legacy (i.e., old) software, hardware, and storage media are less efficient, but replacing them is not only costly but leads to the challenge of finding a reasonable way to recycle.

Changes lie ahead. Environmental product declarations will become standard, and even required. Life cycle analysis will lead to regulation of technology industries and data management services (including "cloud computing"). Equipment will be designed for remanufacture and to last longer. A three-year life cycle for a piece of equipment that contains toxic heavy metals is not going to be good enough — not to mention the fact that a smart phone is estimated to use the equivalent of 600 gallons of gasoline (this includes its manufacture, use, and disposal — its "life cycle").

And we will have to find better ways to manage our own data. In the old days, a single copy of a document would simply be filed. An important document might merit a carbon copy or two. Today, we let digital copies multiply in part because we feel nervous about ever retrieving anything because there is just so much data around. In spite of the environmental cost of this proliferation, there is a **Stanford** open-source backup project called **LOCKSS: Lots of Copies Keeps Stuff Safe**. But when hosting a mere 10MB of data takes a gallon equivalent of gasoline per annum (producing 2-1/2 kilos of carbon dioxide), we should be keeping copies to a minimum. Here's what my email signature says: "Please consider the environmental impact of printing, forwarding, & storing emails. Going paperless isn't necessarily green!"

Karen Christensen is a publisher and writer who specializes in sustainability, social networking, and China. She is the owner and CEO of **Berkshire Publishing Group**, which she cofounded in 1998. She was senior academic editor of the award-winning *Encyclopedia of Community* (Sage 2004) and is the author of popular environmental books translated into French, German, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Thai. She began her career in London, working at **Blackwell Science** and for **Faber & Faber** and the **T.S. Eliot Estate**. This range — from science to literature — characterizes her activities today. She is the author of *Home Ecology, Eco Living, The Green Home,* and *The Armchair Environmentalist*, about which **Lester Brown** wrote, "Filled with wisdom…[there is] more environmental advice in this crisp, tightly written volume than in anything I've seen to date." She divides her time between the Berkshires and New York City and is writing a book about the search for community entitled *A Smaller Circle* (*www.asmallercircle.com*).

Building Sustainable Libraries Preliminary Survey Results

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Guest Editor's Note: *The "Building Sustainable Libraries Survey" gathers information on sustainability efforts at academic libraries across the United States. These preliminary results will be followed by a final report, in greater depth, released next year by* ***Berkshire Publishing Group*** *and* ***Against The Grain****. — **KC***

Over 1/4 (26.9%) of respondents have a sustainability-related degree or research center.

On average, over 1/2 (56.1%) have taken steps to green computer equipment purchasing and services, with the most popular being sharing printers (95.8%), recycling of equipment (87%), and examining cloud computing (71.4%).

As an area for improvement, on average, only 1/4 (23.7%) of institutions chose books based on sustainability criteria, and no institutions report asking suppliers about books sourcing or supply chain.

While over half (56%) of respondents favor electronic resources, fewer (40%) have data on the printing of these resources, and no institutions have inquired on the vendor holding an Environmental Product Declaration.

With the exception of scientific and economics/business journals, the majority of respondents feel that available resources on environmental sustainability are "satisfactory."

On average, almost 1/3 (30.8%) of respondents have implemented some sustainably positive physical changes, with natural lighting, LCD monitors, computer shut downs, and low-water landscaping being the most popular.

On average, almost 3/4 (72.6%) of respondents have implemented sustainably positive changes in terms of supplies, with paper recycling bins (100%), recycle-content paper supplies (96.2%) and the encouragement to reduce office supplies and paper (96.2%) being the most popular.

Over half of respondents belong to AASHE and/or are signatories of the ACUPCC. None of the respondents thought their institution had signed the **Talloires Declaration** (see pages 18 and 30).